

17. COMPETITION BETWEEN JUNGLE MYNA *ACRIDOTHERES FUSCUS*  
AND LESSER GOLDEN BACKED WOODPECKER *DINOPIUM BENGHALENSE*  
FOR A NEST HOLE

A year long survey of a garden of about 675 sq. m, in a thickly populated area at south Kolkata (=Calcutta), showed the presence of 32 species of birds which were attracted to the garden for shelter, nesting ground and food (Jha *et al.* 1997). Recently, a series of events over a few days led me to write this note.

During the middle of April, 1998 while observing the birds in the garden, I noticed a hole in a coconut tree (*Cocos nucifera*), about 6.5 m above the ground (probably made by woodpeckers in the previous year) from which twigs and strips of plastic sheet were hanging out. It appeared that a pair of jungle myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*) had started building a nest a few days ago. The mynas collected and stocked nesting material for the following three days. To my surprise, on the fourth day I found some straw and plastic strips lying on the ground and saw the frontal part of a lesser golden backed woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) jutting out of the hole. It appeared that the woodpeckers had captured the nest of the jungle mynas. The events that followed in the next few days were even more interesting. Quite often, I saw a pair of woodpeckers occupying the nest. During the early hours of the day or afternoon, whenever the jungle mynas returned to their nest, they were chased away by the woodpeckers. After their departure, the woodpeckers quickly entered the hole and established their rights on the territory. A few minutes later, the jungle mynas would return again to observe the woodpeckers and their nest from neighbouring trees. They repeatedly

tried to re-enter the nest, but were vehemently opposed by the woodpeckers. These interactions continued for the next nine days.

One afternoon, I saw the climax of this fascinating drama. I found a large number of jungle mynas (about 25-30) screeching in the neighbouring trees. Suddenly, a few of them rushed inside the hole and forced the woodpecker out. In the meanwhile, a few mynas attacked the other woodpecker perched outside the nest, on the tree trunk. A fight ensued, and the woodpecker pair fell to the ground. The jungle mynas were so ferocious that it seemed as if they would kill the woodpeckers. The fighting continued for about 3-4 minutes, during which the harsh call of the jungle mynas filled the area. Suddenly, a small boy from the adjoining locality interfered in their fight with a stick. The fight stopped and the woodpeckers flew away. The jungle mynas too left the area.

The very next day, the hole was occupied by the jungle mynas again. In the following days I observed that they successfully nested, laid eggs, hatched chicks in the hole, and after completing their parental duties flew away with the two young ones. Interestingly, the woodpeckers were never seen anywhere near the trunk of that particular coconut tree again.

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REFERENCE

JHA, A., S. HOMECHAUDHURI & N.K. SARKAR (1997): A year-long survey of birds in a thickly populated area of South Calcutta. *J. Beng. nat. Hist. Soc.* (N.S.) 16(2): 11-18.